

Luxemburg

Smiling Life in a Modernised Arcadia

By Edward Wright

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THE grand duchy of Luxemburg is a small wedge of Teutonicism between the Walloon region of Belgium, with which there has been an economic union since April, 1922, and the French region of Lorraine. It is only about the size of Warwickshire, in England, or Rhode Island, U.S.A., and its rocky soil nourishes little more than a quarter of a million people of German speech but very mixed race. Size and population are, however, of little value in estimating the importance of the duchy. They count no more than they do at Gibraltar. The mountain tract is the dominating fortress of the western mainland of Europe. It controls the Moselle line of invasion between Germany and France, and from the ancient to the modern period the race that held it possessed one of the main instruments of empire.

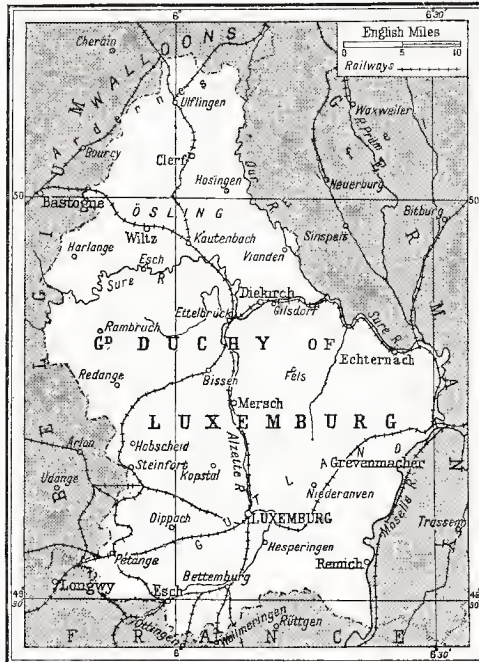
At the present time the lovely highland of stream-riven and weather-carved rock is a scene of peace. The only struggle that goes on is a political-financial affair concerning the famous Luxemburg iron mines. Yet the romance of war colours all its quiet, exquisite landscape, which to the English-speaking traveller is also radiant with pastoral pageantry

and memories of Rosalind and Orlando, Touchstone and the melancholy Jaques.

On nearly every green height the ruins of a castle rise against the sky, and Luxemburg city, whose modern fortification system was only dismantled in the latter part of the nineteenth century, remained in the Great War a natural fortress of great power. The Prussians controlled it, and used it with indirect but tremendous effect in the opening campaign against France.

The military importance of Luxemburg is probably as great now as it was in the past. Rome recognized its value and left a remarkable abundance of ruins, which excel in picturesque interest the wreckage of the later ages. She has also touched the mind of the peasant race, that strangely respects the ancient

altars glimmering in the green shadows of the forest. As a White Lady, Diana still wanders among the deer in the woodland; while in one poor commune, Hercules, Apollo, Juno, and Minerva listen every day to Mass, forming the old altar ornament of the Four Gods, which the villagers refuse to sell to millionaires. They regard the antique carving as a mystery of a sacred character, and reject the thousands of



THE GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBURG



VIGILANCE THAT GUARDS THE PALACE GATE

With his Mauser rifle at the slope, his shako, and gleaming buttons, the sentry pauses a moment on his beat before the Palais du Roi, the grand-ducal residence of the capital. The sentry-box is particularly well-made

Photo, Donald McLeish

pounds offered for it. The most curious legacy of the classic age is a renowned breed of pigs, whose juniper-smoked hams were among the supreme delicacies of a Roman table, and recently much beloved by the Teuton, who included Luxemburg in his custom-house system.

Modern Luxemburg opens her history with the arrival of an Englishman from the Humber in the seventh century. He was a missionary, Willibrord, who

converted many heathens and, before being killed by them, founded Echternach, which is still the holy city of the duchy. He was a genial saint, with a vineyard, an eye for natural loveliness, and a feeling for brightening up religion. His remarkable dance, with its five steps forward and three steps backward, which is reputed to cure all the ills of the body, is the most popular antiquity of Luxemburg. Every Whitsun, in his old abbey town, it is performed by some twenty thousand musicians, singers, and pilgrims, with banner-carriers and some hundred and twenty priests. For five hours or more the multitude dances from the Surc bridge, by the Rhenish frontier, to Willibrord's tomb in the abbey church.

The windows of all the houses are decorated with flowers, flags and streamers float above the streets, and when the great dance ends in the afternoon a merry fair begins and goes on through the night. Clean forgotten in his own country,

Willibrord reigns in Luxemburg; even his father is highly honoured, and every year more folk come to the Whitsun dance. The last time the civil authorities stopped the dance an outbreak of cattle disease followed. The scientific explanation of faith-healing helps rather than hinders the increasing popularity of one of the most bizarre and picturesque pilgrimages of Europe.

There is another live English antiquity in Echternach. There an old-fashioned

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Sussex farmhand would find tall, fair men and women to talk to him. Grammatical changes in the course of eleven hundred years would at first puzzle him; on the other hand, many of his good old words would come in pat and handy, and he would soon understand why the Luxemburgers hold that "they are all English at Gilsdorf."

The folk of Folkendingen also are survivors of a stubborn remnant of the old pagan stock which refused to follow Ella into Sussex. As they specialised in murdering English missionaries of the Willibrord school, Charlemagne, on the advice of a Yorkshireman, forcibly marched them into the region of the Sure river, to be converted by no gentle means.

The real maker of the duchy was a descendant of Charlemagne in the tenth century. He was Count Siegfried, an ambitious younger brother of the

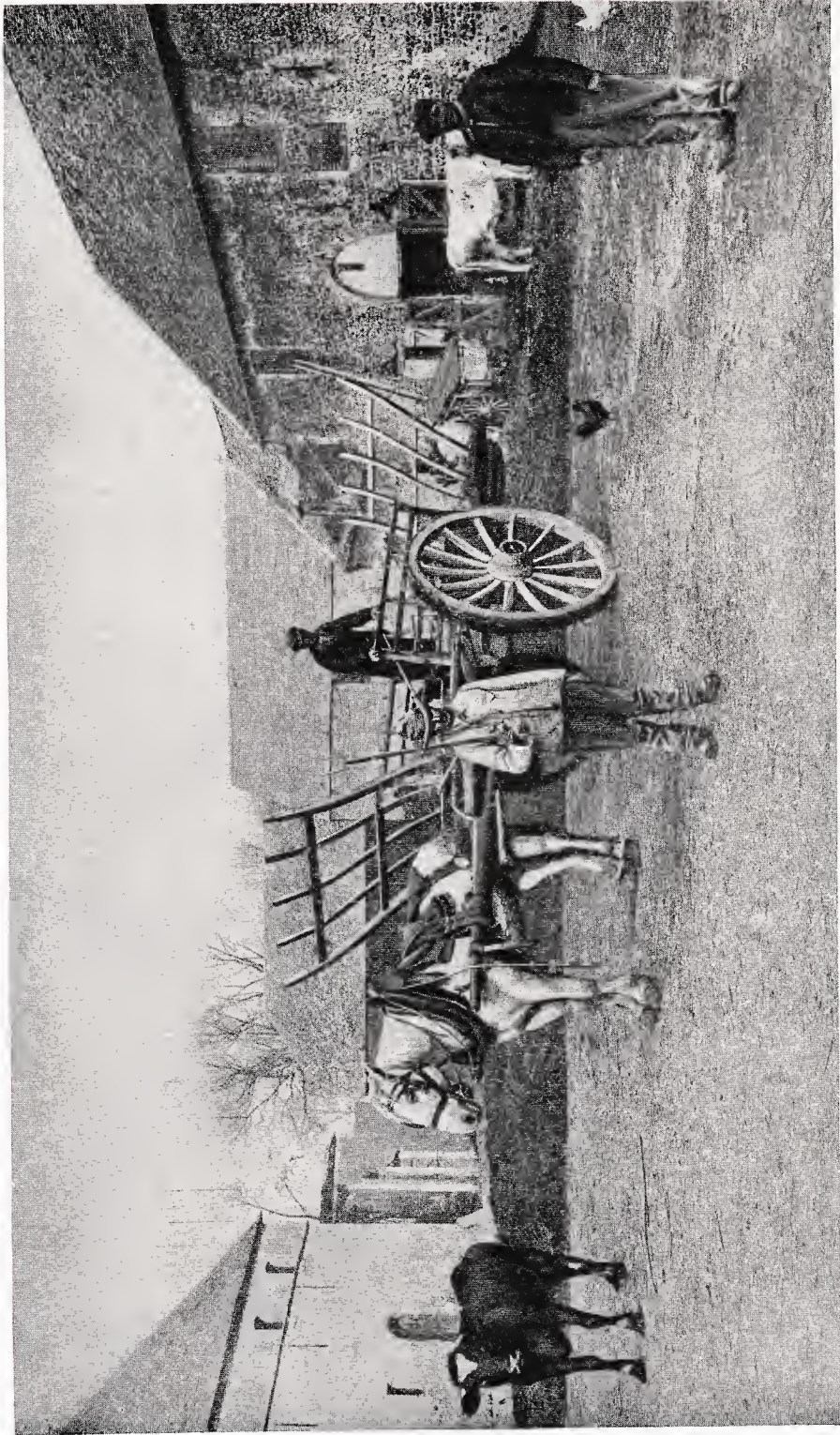
duke of High Lorraine. He saw the value of the "Little Burg," formed of the crags and winding canyon of the modern city, which was then only a neglected Moselle outpost. Its native name is Letzelburech, but old forms approach very closely in sound to "Littleburg." Siegfried began making it the "great burg," and, in the judgement of Carnot, "the strongest fortress in Europe after Gibraltar; the only base for attacking France by way of the Moselle." Thus was founded the House of Luxembourg, that produced emperors and empire-builders, kings, crusaders, saints, and some pretty villains.

For centuries the stronghold was the base of a sound, good business in black-mail; then it was that almost every difficult hill of the enlarged territory was fortified, making ring upon ring of outer defences of the main burg. This led to another trick. The head of the



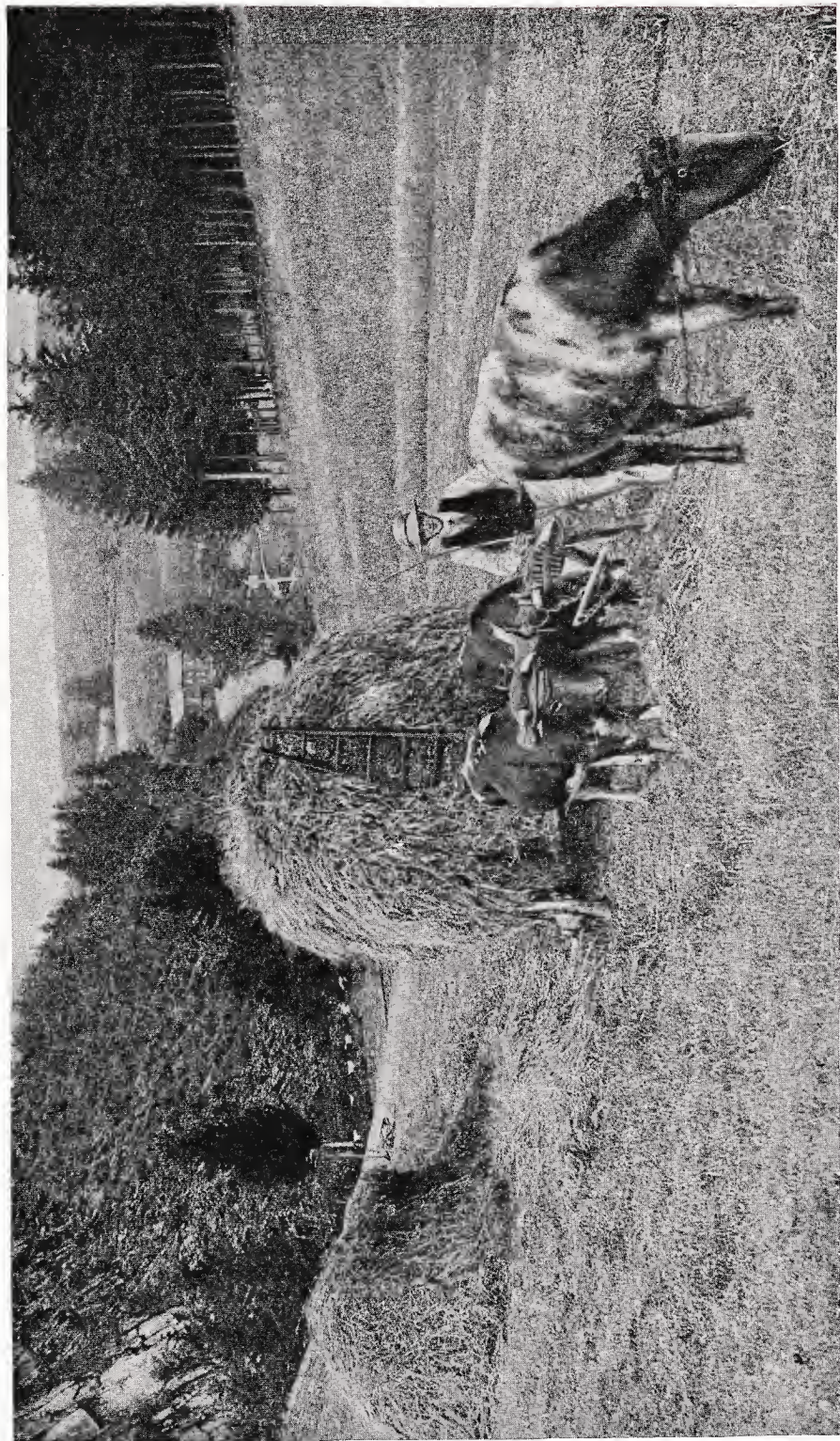
OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM IN A COW PASTURE OF GUTLAND

Though the herdsman hopes for the best, the cow evidently expects the worst, and cares not for walking the plank that bends even beneath her master's comparatively light weight. The hand of encouragement is stretched out towards her distrustful muzzle, though the rod of correction and the rope of compulsion are at hand if need should arise



SETTING FORTH FOR THE HAY-FIELDS FROM A LUXEMBURG FARM WITH WAIN AND PITCHFORK

As well as being highly productive in other directions, the grand duchy is, before anything, an agricultural country. Three-fifths of its area are under cultivation, and rich yields are gained from vines and from fields which give crops of potatoes, oats, wheat, and rye. There are plenty of fine farms such as this, with long and rambling outhouses, of many coloured bricks and lichened tiles, surrounding the central midden over which strut the farmyard fowls seeking what they may devour



HIGH-PILED WAGON THAT BEARS HOME IN LEISURELY FASHION THE FRAGRANT FRUITS OF HAY HARVEST

When the reapers' work is over, the creaking wain rolls slowly farm-ward, the leisurely oxen pausing ever and again to glean the sweet-scented wisps that have fallen from the haymakers' forks. An impression of Luxemburg's varied countryside may be gained from this photograph, showing the steep slope of the hayfield and, beyond the road that winds along the valley bottom, a rocky outcrop among the pines. In the distance undulate uplands of copse and corn-land

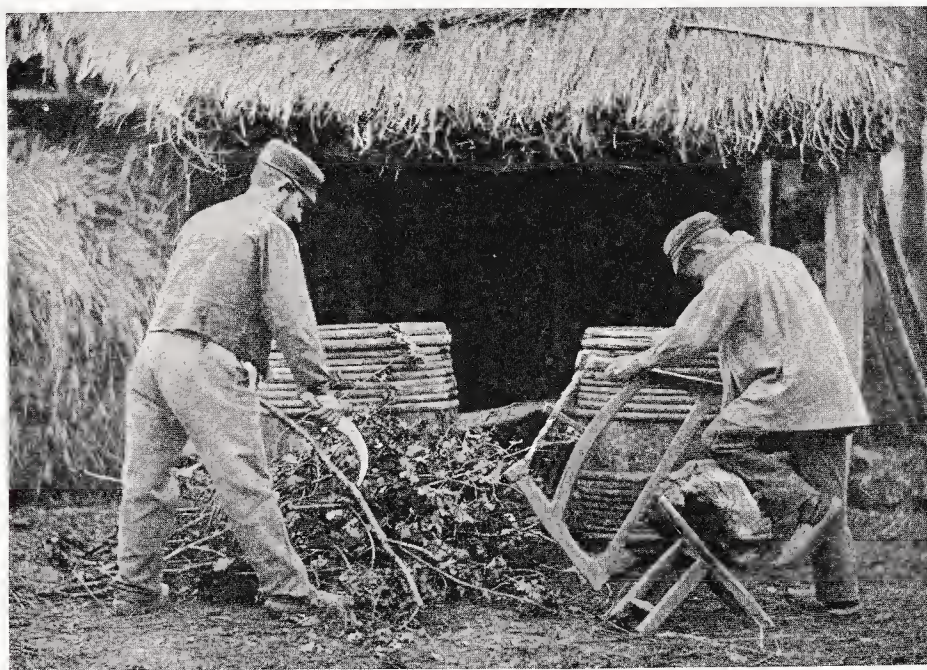
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family that provided Germany, Austria, Bohemia, Brabant, and other countries with every variety of ruler from emperor to plain count, lost the blackmailing business, through the blackmailed folk becoming subjects of the House of Luxemburg.

It only really paid to interrupt the international traffic between Ostend and Basel. So a mortgage scheme was developed. Every potentate who wanted the reversion of the strongest of strongholds was invited to lend huge sums of money. Duke Wenceslaus was the best at this game. He left the largest group of ambitious mortgagees, each of whom was entitled to an impregnable fortress system which he could not win. Then the last duchess, an expert poisoner, really sold the duchy to her powerful nephew, Philip of Burgundy, and by secret arrangement he took the city with a grand show of force, in the fifteenth century.

Thus ended the age of pageantry and businesslike romance. Passing by marriage to a new Count of Luxemburg, Charles, who was also Emperor of half the world, and to his son, Philip II. of Spain, the duchy was the centre of operations of the new period of scientific warfare. The Hapsburg family wanted to complete their ring of dominions by including France in it. France wanted to safeguard her independence by the possession of Luxemburg.

In effect, the struggle became a renewal of the stark, primitive duel between Gaul and Teuton, in which Rome had intervened. In the modern conflict Great Britain intervened indirectly yet decisively. After Marlborough's victories, she gave the duchy to Austria. After Wellington's victories she renewed the Teutonic connexion, and the province passed into the German Confederation and into the



TWO COOPERS OF LUXEMBURG AND THEIR RUDE WORKSHOP

Roughly but sturdily put together with timber and thatch, this woodland cooperage serves to keep the broad barrels from the weather. The man on the left is selecting suitable pieces from the pile of brushwood at his elbow, material of which there is plenty close at hand, the casks being bound with sections of the split wood nailed round their sides. His companion manipulates a bow-saw

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Hohenzollern zollverein, with monarchical puppets of the Nassau dynasty, distinguished by its lack of heirs and its pretty German grand duchesses. Again the British intervened, indirectly but very strongly, and Luxemburg once more is practically the bastion gate of Gaul.

All this is the dry skin of history shrivelling round a curious, living romance. Profound was the hate the Luxemburgers bore the French a hundred years ago, after their tragic peasants' war against them; now, if they do not exactly love France, they are ready to be wooed by her. France has done nothing to win this favour. Heavy-handed Prussia has done it for her. There was a Prussian garrison in Luxemburg citadel from 1815 to 1867, and from 1914 to 1918. Though a native poet wrote that French lilies could not grow on Luxemburg rock, and, as he veiled it in Latin, the country was the mountain nest of the Germanic eagles:

Sum petra; petrino non crescunt lilia fundo;

In petris aquilæ nidificare solent,

the first stay of the Black Eagle made the people think that rock-grown lilies would do better. The later event strengthened this revulsion of feeling, though the pretty duchess, Marie-Adelaide, and her matchmaking mother did not like the new popular taste in gardening.

Despite her troubles, the duchy is a romantic Ruritania. And is there a finer scenic background than Luxemburg city? Out of the highland rock a stream has cut a great steep ravine of

serpentine shape. Running into the lower curve, a silver thread of rill water has also cut another tremendous moat. Thus defended on three sides, a great black, hollow crag juts out, carrying

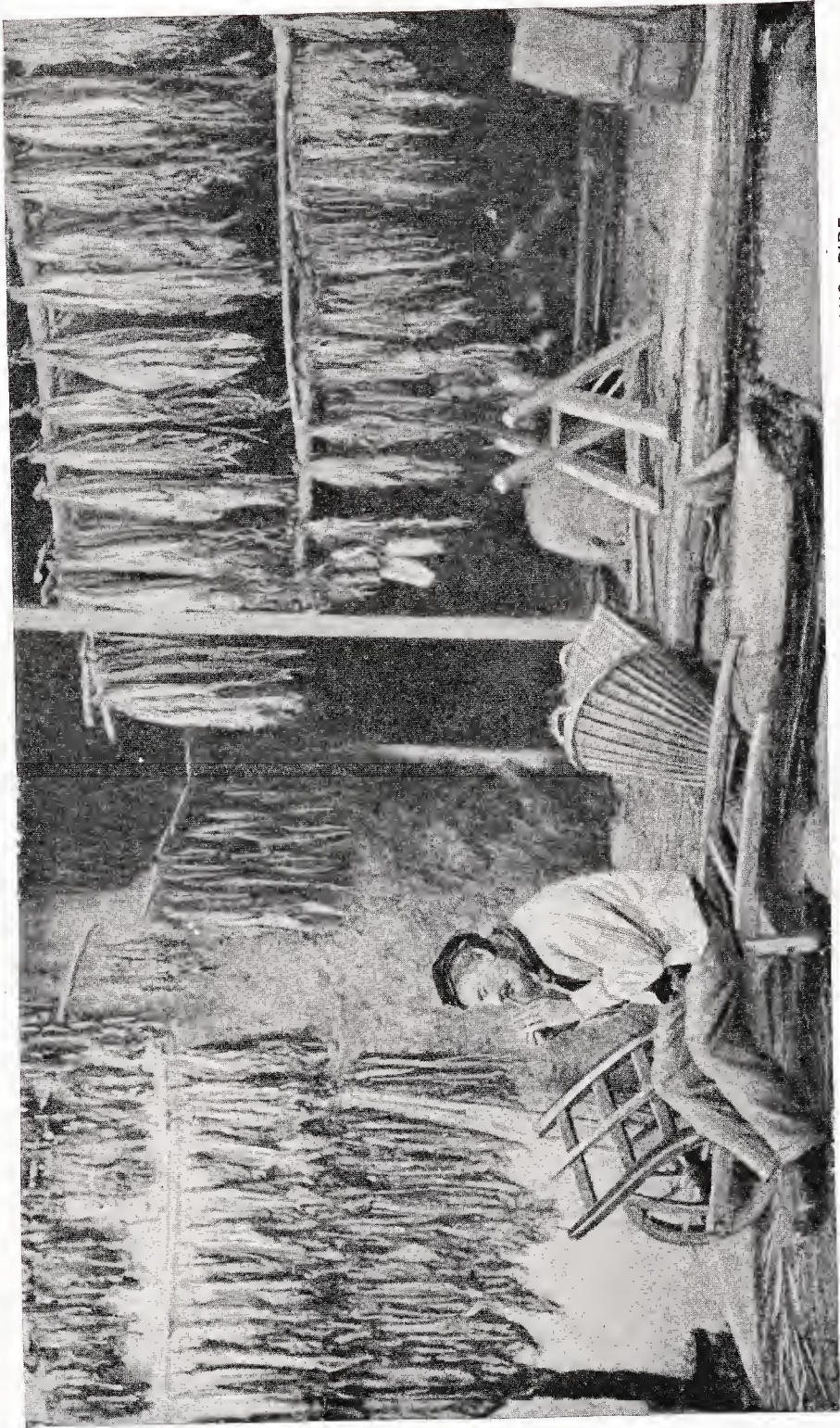


FURROWS OF TIME'S PLOUGHING

Old age, while wrinkling her face, has smoothed away care from it, and she is content to sit in the sun, wrapped warm in her woollen shawl and her memories

the ruins of Siegfried's castle and the stronghold of blind John of Bohemia.

It is a picture that has changed from a blank screen of triple medieval ramparts into a modern complication of demi-lunes, chains of bastions, mighty vaults, redoubts, and a plain-looking yet intricate system of fortification. On the sides of the rock—which is historically the "Bock" and popularly the "Hollow Tooth"—are rows of holes like dead eye-sockets. Through them eyes of gunners peered and cannon pointed. Below, there are now partly unexplored subterranean labyrinths, by which perilous and distant



PEASANT OF THE GRAND DUCHY WHOSE OWN SKILL AND LABOUR FILL HIS PIPE

Hung from poles and along the walls of his barn where they may cure in the sun and be readily placed under cover in case of rain, this countryman has arranged his plucked tobacco plants. When this process is complete the plants are stripped and the leaves piled in heaps to ferment, considerable heat being generated at this stage. The quality of the tobacco depends largely on the methods employed in these operations which, in this case, are probably somewhat rough and ready.

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battle points were connected in the heat of action. To save themselves from going to war in 1866, French and Prussian blew up the modern works. So it was reported at the time. The truth was they spent some years and much explosive trying to do so. Luxembourg's mail is somewhat tattered; the immense stone aprons that made the precipices as unscalable as polished steel, gleam in fragments; trenches are filled; many a scarp and counter-scarp is hard to trace. Yet the damage done by explosives, garden-making, park-designing, and house-building seems out-balanced by the use of machine-guns and other new instruments of war.

I think the men of Ypres could hold the city and batter assailing armies to bits. So could the men who held Verdun, under conditions similar to those of the Great War, chief of which were open communications in the rear of a fortified front of defence, which, if not attacked, would be a base for forward operations.

Majesty Touched with Loveliness

In the month of roses all this is forgotten. Strength is hidden in beauty. It is fairyland in a perfumed veil. Yet the city is always a thing majestic touched with loveliness. Even the huge viaducts, which, a wit says, turn the city into a dollar, are finely proportioned. In shape the town is an S, through which the striding railway tries to send the dollar sign. The grand ducal palace of the sixteenth century, with Spanish-Moorish detail, is another good Ruritania setting, as likewise are the old-fashioned alleys of the lower town.

It would be a pity if the duchy were absorbed in any large State. It is a perfect miniature world. Such are its diversities and contrasting delights of landscape, that of all the lost parts, only the Eifel territory, seized by Prussia, seems, as a matter of natural beauty, worth regaining. Small as the country now is, nature and man have divided it into two climes and four dialects.

Northward is the hard rock with scanty soil of the Ardenne Ösling, a region of little mountains, wooded slopes, and labyrinthine dales. Southward is the soft sandstone and warm, fertile earth of Gutland, running down to the Moselle vineyards, and extending eastward into fantastic mazes of wild rock scenery. Ösling holds reticent, hard-minded, yet courteous highlanders. Gutland is thronged with genial, conversational valley folk.

Agricultural Skill of the Peasants

The peasants have the land. Their small holdings grow smaller, as by law they must be divided among all children. To remedy this more fields can be obtained from the Government or the parish councils. To improve the freshly-broken ground there are required hard labour, knowledge, and money. The State provides the knowledge and money. The loans can be paid off by instalments out of profits.

The way the little yeoman farmers work and the technical, modernised information they gather and use are wonderful. Their boast is that they are the best agriculturists in the world. Perhaps they are. Certain it is that, maintained by the financial power of the duchy, they keep the duchy prosperous.

Happiness of True Democracy

Nearly all the people are pious and cheerful. Even the serious highlander has outbursts of merriment. The dancing spirit of the great national festival runs through the race. In at least some village weddings the rite ends with bride and bridegroom kissing before the altar and then dancing out of the church. The kermesses of the Middle Ages, fairs with business mixed with jollity, are maintained. Some say the great August kermess of Luxembourg city commemorates the disaster of Crecy, when blind John of Bohemia and Luxembourg was killed, and the news turned all merrymaking into

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COUNTRY CHARMS AND COSTUME

This sweet lass of Luxemburg, in her tartan bodice and chequered apron, has been caught in a pretty pose as she leans against the wall flanking a country highway

sorrow. But the modern Fair of Disaster is as joyful a gathering as one could wish to join, with nearly as many flowers and flags as in the children's carnival of roses, held annually on the Sunday before Ascension Day in honour of Our Lady of Luxemburg, patroness of the city, which was founded also in a day of peril.

What adds to all the pleasure and sweetens all the work is the spirit of genuine democracy and social equality in the little land of plain-living, simple folk. There are no beggars; every body can read and write, and facility in speaking both French and German is widespread in a race with four dialects, good foreign trade, and no remarkable native literature. The peasant, with a good working knowledge of his

own branch of science, has, like Kipling's Kim, two sides to his head—an ancient side and a modern side. In the hours of winter leisure he is like an imaginative child, for he lives on the old oral culture, loves fairy tales, folk songs, folk dances, and traditional stories, and half believes at times in such national heroines as the serpent woman, Melusine, and the White Lady of the woods.

He is a medieval man, expert in the latest farming machinery and other modern practical things, yet akin in thought and feeling to the pilgrims of Chaucer's day, and he goes on pilgrimages himself. If his aged, enfeebled mother ails, he may dance for her at Echternach, or send his eldest son, if work keeps him at home. He knows also of holy healing springs, and if his comely wife cannot find on occasion a good white witch—or as some call her, a wise woman—it means that there has been an unusual movement of chilly scepticism in the family, such as grandmother would not approve of.

It is a tranquil, natural way of life, and not without colour and consolation. The influence of it seems to become a quality in the air one breathes, and to live in it but a brief space is, even for stranger blood, to come under the insistence of its mystic magnetism. The motoring tourist will perhaps miss it. The duchy is an affair of short distances, and only rambles on foot, who prefer sinuous by-paths to good straight roads, can savour the charms of the Arcady of the Elizabethan poets, with its

Shallow rivers by whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

Thomas Lodge's Rosalind lives again in many a fair maid on upland steading or valley farm, while Shakespeare's richer-natured heroine has gone into the world of imagination, with the white Luxemburg goddesses which the late-homing peasant sometimes sees through a very vinous mist when shafts of moonlight strike through the forest.